

So You Are The Owner of Property Used as a Meth Lab, Now What?

What is Methamphetamine?

Methamphetamine is a drug; the most powerful central nervous system stimulant known to man. It has other names, such as “meth,” “crank,” “speed” or “ice,” just to name a few. It is a highly addictive substance. Oftentimes after just one use, the user will be hooked. Meth can be found in the form of pills, capsules, powder, or chunks. It can be smoked/inhaled, snorted, injected or eaten.

How is meth made?

Meth is easily made with materials that are readily available. There are several techniques used to make meth. All of these processes use a variety of chemicals; including solvents, metals, salts and corrosives (acids). During the drug manufacturing process (cooking), many additional compounds and byproducts are made. The fumes, vapors and spillage associated with cooking can be toxic and may be considered hazardous waste.

Where do meth labs occur?

Almost any property can be used as a meth lab. The more popular types are: rental properties, motel rooms, storage units, campgrounds, and out buildings in rural areas. A meth lab can easily be transported in the trunk of a car, which makes it portable to almost any location.

What happens when a lab is busted?

When a meth lab is found, the local law enforcement agencies and hazardous waste personnel come in to collect and list all evidence of the lab. This includes equipment, chemicals and other materials used in the lab.

The local Health Department is also notified of the drug lab and initiates the process to determine whether the structure is “fit” for human use. They will do an inspection and post the property with a sign indicating that the property may be contaminated. In the following weeks the property may be declared “unfit for use.” A

notice will be posted on the property and notices will be sent to the property owner(s) and recorded on the title of the property.

What does “unfit for use” mean?

It means that the property has to be cleaned up before it can be reused. **Entry is prohibited.**

Who is responsible for cleaning up the property?

The owner of the property is ultimately responsible for clean up. The owner may also be legally responsible if persons get sick after they re-enter a contaminated building.

If the police take the equipment and materials used to make meth, why do I have to clean up the property?

During the manufacturing process it is possible that contamination from dust, powder and vapors released during the cooking process were left on surfaces and in absorbent materials, such as carpets, furniture, drapes, wallboard, ceiling tiles, sinks, drains and ventilation systems. The soil or groundwater may also become contaminated if chemicals were spilled or dumped on the ground or disposed in a septic system.



An explosion in a meth lab started the fire that destroyed this building in Thurston County. Labs may also be set with booby traps – another reason to stay clear.

How is a property cleaned up?

The first step in clean up is to determine if the property is contaminated above the state's clean up threshold of five micrograms per square foot (5 µg/ft²). Testing/sampling must be done by a certified clean up contractor. Currently clean up must also be done by a certified contractor. The contractor must file a written clean up plan with the Health Department for their review and approval.

To find certified contractors in your area you can contact your local health department or Lew Kittle with the Washington State Department of Health, Clandestine Drug Lab Program (360) 236-3381 or download the CERTIFIED CONTRACTOR LIST from the internet at www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/cld.htm

How much will it cost?

A certified contractor will give you a bid on the cost of clean up. The size of the structure and extent of the contamination will effect the cost of clean up.

How long will it take to get the property cleaned up?

It usually takes 4-6 weeks for a contractor to clean up the property. Again, it depends on the size of the structure and the extent of contamination.

Can I go back onto the property to get personal belonging?

Yes, but only after law enforcement officers have completed their investigation. Until the property has been determined “unfit for use” you may enter the property and retrieve personal belongings, AT YOUR OWN RISK. Open the windows and doors to increase ventilation prior to entering and thereby reduce the risk of inhaling dangerous fumes. Keep in mind that the belongings you are retrieving may be contaminated and should be handled carefully.

What health risks are associated with the property?

While the amount of contamination may be small, it still poses serious health risk to the persons exposed to them.

The potential health effects depend on:

- the specific chemicals a person is exposed to,
- how much of each chemical a person was exposed to,
- how long a person was exposed, and
- the health condition of the person being exposed.

The most common and persistent contaminate is the meth itself. Exposure to meth residue may cause symptoms similar to those experienced by the meth users themselves.

People who enter a drug lab, after a police bust has been completed but before it has been properly cleaned and ventilated, may feel headaches, nausea, dizziness and fatigue. These symptoms usually go away after several hours.

People who enter a lab during, or immediately after, a drug bust may experience shortness of breath, cough, chest pain, dizziness, lack of coordination, burns and even death.

Keep in mind that you may find used needles and flammable liquids on the property that can be hazardous to your health.

How can I find out if a property was used as a meth lab?

Your local health department has a list of homes in Benton and Franklin Counties that were used as meth labs. You can call the Benton-Franklin Health District at (509) 582-7761 x. 246 to find out if a property is on the list and if it was cleaned up properly. Washington State also provides a web site (www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/Ts/cld.htm) with a list of places drug labs were found.

What Are Some Signs That a Property is Being Used as a Meth Lab?

- Strong odor of solvents
- Residences with the windows blacked out
- Iodine or chemical stained bathroom or kitchen fixtures
- Renters who pay in cash
- Increased activity at night
- Excessive trash

How Do I Prevent My Property From Being Damaged?

Interview prospective renters in person, do a background check, check references thoroughly, and strongly advise them as to what can be stored on the rented property (i.e., a commercial painter could be storing paint and solvents which are a fire hazard).

My neighbor's home was busted as a meth lab, how does this affect me?

It probably will not affect you, but if you have health concerns, talk to your doctor.

Who to Call:

To report a suspected lab:

Local Law Enforcement

General questions about drug labs:

Benton-Franklin Health District
(509) 582-7761 ext. 246

Concerns about health effects of meth:

Washington State Department of Health,
390-236-3381

Questions about clean up resources:

Benton-Franklin Health District
582-7761 ext. 246

For more information or assistance:

Benton-Franklin Health District
Environmental Health Division
800 W. Canal Drive
Kennewick, WA 99336
(509) 582-7761 ext. 246
BFHD-E-0072 (4/00)

Facts About METH LAB CLEAN UP

